

Agnes and Pepa: at the vegetarian cooperative living house near campus

Friday at 2:30 pm

Observation:

The house is oldish, but not ornate or grande. The outside is well kept. The front lawn and porch are not stockpiled with cast-away furniture and grills like some college houses are. On the small porch is a loveseat, and draped around the front awning is a colorful tibetan prayer flag. When I arrive on my bike, the front screen door is closed but the main door is ajar. I knock on the aluminum door and a tall young man with long black hair answered. I ask for Agnes, but am told that she does not live there. Pepa comes to the door smiling, and introduces herself. She is wearing a long grey knit skirt, black legwarmers, black t-shirt that says something like "free yourself from oil!" and a black and grey knitted shrug. I learn that Agnes is a friend of Pepa, and will be arriving soon. They invite my bike and I into the house. I park my bike in a small room to the left of the entrance which also houses a piano and a TV that is sitting on a chair with rented DVDs on top. My bike almost blocks the hallway which, I later learn, leads to the kitchen. To the right of the entrance is the main room which is open and brightly lit by a large south facing window. On the east facing wall is a bookshelf and a smaller high window with plants on the sill. There are two sofas on each of these walls, and a coffee table in front of them. On the coffee table is a big bowl that used to contain popcorn. There are a couple issues of "Adbusters" magazine and a big library book of anti-ad graphic design. There is a glass punchbowl on the table and a couple glasses of wine. On one wall is a computer desk with a large off-white desktop computer monitor. Two end-tables had huge glass lamps with olive green cylindrical lampshades. The room is messy, but not unclean, and it smells well ventilated. The furnishings are all second-hand. The floors, baseboards, and trimmings are dark hardwood, and the walls are painted maroon, light yellow, light green, and other solid colors.

I make myself at home on the couch next to Pepa and her boyfriend. I need to sit because Pepa is much taller than my 5'6" and I feel awkward being so little. The guy who answered the door--Paul is his name--is sitting in a chair in the middle of the room, next to the coffee table, facing me. They ask me if I would like some wine, but I decline because I am really full from a late lunch. I introduce myself to Paul and Pepa's boyfriend Marc who also lives there. Pepa is friendly and talkative, and tells everyone that I am doing a project. Paul asks me about my project and I give him the gist of it. He is a graduate or PhD student who lives in the co-op with Pepa, Marc, and ten other people. Marc and I begin to talk about South America and bikes, and he shows me some photos. I realize that we are just hanging out waiting for Agnes. No-one seems to be in a hurry to have an interview, and I feel welcome in the house.

For some reason, I have felt small in this house since I arrived. Marc is about my height, but Pepa and Paul are much taller. I am usually not conscious of my height. I believe this has something to do with my underlying perception that a co-op might be

exclusive to "outsiders". I find that this is not the case at all, and in fact Pepa welcomes me by saying "this is a community space--make yourself at home!" However, my positioning as interviewer brings to the forefront the issue of belonging, even if this is a place I could imagine myself living or hanging out at in any normal situation. I have a desire to convey to them that I am not one of the sorority suburbanites who think they are weirdo hippies, or that I am just there to study them.

Agnes arrives. She is shorter than I am, and quieter than Pepa. Agnes wears jeans, turtleneck, and a Northface jacket. She sits in the chair that Paul has left. I am explaining to Agnes the project while Marc and Pepa kiss each other good-bye under a coat that they throw over their heads. This is an awkward but funny moment, and I can tell that Agnes is more intent on getting to the interview than Pepa. I believe she wants to do this on my behalf---although I don't mind wasting time--and she has to be somewhere at 5:00. Pepa sits on the couch next to me, and I explain to them the consent forms. They sign, testing recorder 1-2-3, I switch chairs with Agnes so I face both of them, and we are ready.

Interview:

Me: *What are your majors, like what do you study and what years are you?*

Pepa: Well, we both study Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences, and I'm a senior.

Agnes: And I'm a junior. And we are studying human dimensions, but there are--there's resource ecology, there's human dimensions--there's different, like--

Pepa: --soil and water conservation...forestry...fish and wildlife... So we chose the human aspect part of environmental science.

Me: *So, what does that entail exactly? Human dimensions--what is it in your own words?*

Pepa: I just think it's taking.. well, we take sociology classes, psychology classes--you can choose an assortment of different types of classes that put the human spin on environmental problems.

Agnes: I would say we just like.. everything environmental there is a human aspect, because there isn't a lot of environment left and untouched by humans, and that is completely natural. The human impacts are really important, and we study the connections, or the disconnects, I would say, between humans and nature.

Me: *Ok.. so I'm interested in...what is your philosophy on how humans and the*

environment relate? I mean, people have different ideas about what the environment actually is, you know what I mean?

Pepa: I think what's most interesting from a western perspective, a western society, is that we view a dichotomy between humans and nature, between.. like we're humans and that's nature. But in indigenous societies throughout the world, there is no dichotomy. They are nature. They live nature. They breathe nature. We seem to have created a dichotomy from the way our society is industrialized. And the methods of production have created us to not have to worry about our food, to not have to worry about our water--it's there. If we have the money to pay--the capital to buy it--what does that mean? I don't know, that's sort of a little ramble.

Me: *That's cool.*

Agnes: I don't know, just sort of the whole, you know, we're avoiding, we're not really thinking about.. There's not a lot of connection. I really see it as more of a disconnect. And if there is a connection, it's like "Oh for the weekend I'm going to go camping, and I'm going to live in the wilderness!" or "I'm going to go apple-picking!" People do these things to try to connect with nature, but it has to be something that is very deliberate, it has to be planned out, it can't just be like--people don't just like walk down the street and stand under a tree and appreciate the tree and look at the different parts.

Me: *So you are like more for integrating--an integrative way of looking... or just for the natural awareness that it IS integrated? I mean..*

Pepa: Yeah, I think just studying environmental science has made me a lot more aware of my relationship to nature. You know, when you study ecology, when you study your intrinsic vulnerability to the planet, its physicalities, like, you need to eat, you need water, you need forests, you need so many things just for your existence. It's difficult for me just not to care about it, because you know, it's THERE. You know, the more I study it, the more--I'm sort of rambling.

Me: *Ramble all you want!* (laugh)

Pepa: (laugh) Ramble! Nobody's transcribing these are they? Because I had to transcribe things the other day!

Me: *I don't mind, it's kind of fun.*

All: (laughing)

Pepa: Ok, so what was your original question?

Me: *I don't know, how does this manifest itself in your everyday life?*

Agnes: Well, I don't drive a car, I have a license, but I don't drive. I bike wherever I

need to go. This summer I probably biked between 10 and 15 miles a day just wherever. Um, I mean, I also try to think about, like, if I'm going somewhere and I'm going to need a plastic bag, or anything like that, just like think about it. Because even just, like, if you go to the store and you use a plastic bag, that's fine, but somebody else could use that bag. Other people aren't going to think about it. And um, I don't really look at it like anything that I'm doing, like, that's difficult, I just feel like I'm trying to do my part. And I'm not even doing my part, but it's not like... I don't know... it's not like a heroic thing. People are like "Oh you bike everywhere? Oh that's awesome!" and it's like, no, that's just how people should.. how people should think of it.

Pepa: For me, just, how my care for the environment relates to my everyday lifestyle... I mean, first of all, you are in a vegetarian cooperative. I don't eat meat. I don't eat fish. I don't eat dairy products usually. I think that is probably my most direct connection to--I think eating is a really important act for us, to maintain our physical bodies, um, I think being vegetarian really shows that I care about the environment. You talk about... it's just a waste of energy, it's just a lot of things. Um, I don't buy clothes at department stores anymore. I don't go shopping. I don't buy things I don't need. Re-use. Bring jars--last year when I didn't live in a cooperative, I would bring all my own containers to Common Ground food co-op, buy all my food, put it all in re-usable jars, bring it back home, buy only organic produce. Sacrifice so I can afford that. That's what's important to me.

Me: *So, do you think that's hard for students to, like... you guys talk about transportation and food basically, do you think that's difficult for students? You think people don't think about it?*

Agnes: I mean, it's so convenient, you have all this stuff. I live in a dorm and you can go to late-night, and you can buy single serving cereal--a plastic thing that you can't recycle. Or you know, just things that, like, it's convenient, and it makes your lifestyle more comfortable or faster. So I think people, that's what they're interested in--convenience. Not necessarily sustainability.

Me: *Oh, you said the word sustainability. It's kind of a hot topic right now, not that it hasn't been, but the idea, like, of sustainability is kind of... it's a word that's come up in a lot of popular books lately. People are talking about it. Do you think it's a fad? You think what you do is contributing to sustainability? Is there an idealized dream of sustainability? I don't know--that's a million questions!*

All: (laughing)

Pepa: I'm just thinkin' about it.

Me: *It's ok.*

Pepa: It depends on the context. I think a lot of people don't enjoy the word sustainability, because, well, what does that mean? Sustain what? For what amount of

time? I think that for the way we're living right now--I just read a fact, well I don't know, a proposed fact, that it would take five or six planets to consume the way our society consumes. Like, industrialized society. I don't know, I think sustainability is a hot topic, and it kinda should be, considering the way we're, like, exploiting the resources--Earth's resources--and wasting, and producing just a ton of shit that really shouldn't be produced the way that it is.

Agnes: And in terms of, like, other, where I think it's the common issue for a lot of industrialized societies where now they're getting, beginning to see the impact of mass production and, um, not really thinking about things from conservation, rather, like exploiting and how can we---like where are we gonna put our garbage?--all those things. Now we are having to think about them because we've produced so much, we've used so much. I think... and then we're expecting other countries, like China, for example, is in the midst of a lot of industrialization, an era where we maybe have already gone through in terms of mass production, and we're expecting them to cap it off and to think about, you know, pollution and things like that? That's fine, but how can we--I feel like, how can we as a country expect other countries to think about sustainability, like um, when we're not going to allow them to do the things we've done in terms of industrialization? That's, like, a problematic way to look at it, um.

Pepa: Yeah.

Agnes: Because, but then it's also, you know, trying to prevent another country where everyone's biked forever, I'm thinking of China, everyone's ridden bikes for so long and it's just the way everyone gets to work. And it's become, like, a status symbol to have a personal car, and a lot of people are driving now instead of biking. And I think that just comes from the way that we have, like... I think it's other people trying to, like, other countries' lifestyles... people trying to... emulate things that they see. And you can't measure happiness with material goods. It's really hard.

Me: *That's interesting that you say happiness. It almost becomes a moral lifestyle issue.*

Pepa: Well, I look at my ways of--like studying environmental science, eating vegetarian--I think a lot of it has to do with, like, why does anybody do anything? Like, why do we have friends? Why do we eat food? Why do we go to school? Like, why do we do anything? I think, like, automatically, that's what they want to be--the goal is happiness. Everybody wants to be well, no matter what they believe in, where they come from. And I think that's a really important thing to consider when we're talking about sustainability. Ok, what's the goal? What's the outcome? Why do we industrialize? Why do we manipulate food production? Ok, so we are producing more food. Ok, so people are profiting from it. That makes some people more happy--that gives material wealth. Just, like, the notion of the cultural idea that material wealth is the goal, that's the objective--like, that's a culturally wrong idea. Psychological studies are showing now that more money, like people in richer nations are not well off--are not better off than people in poorer nations. A very small fraction. Basically, what I'm trying

to say--to summarize: when it comes past taking care of your basic needs--food, water, your nature needs, your environmental needs--people aren't much happier as the result of success. And that's what I'm interested in. Because I come from a rich-ass suburb, and these people with, you know, excess everything, and no one is really better off as a result. It just turns into this rat-race of competition, always wanting more, and having to have, and keep on going. The treadmills of consumption and production--that's what fuels this environmental degradation. Sustainability can only occur when an ideology changes. When people decide that--you know, if people can't decide for themselves, then nature's gonna decide for us. It's been evident with climate change. Oh, where do we start? What kind of environmental problems can we think of right now? (laughter) The whole fisheries collapse, deforestation of the earth's lungs--the rainforest--desertification, um, water pollution, air pollution, land use, wasted resources. You look all around you--we study it, we live it. You might not see it, but the earth is sufferin'! We are raping this planet like you'd never believe! Like any planet has ever seen that we know of! Like, what other species can completely manipulate the way this is... That's a ramble.

Agnes: When you say sustainability, like, to sustain what? Obviously not to sustain what we're doing now because we're not.. it's not something that looks at the long-run. So I don't think you can--you know that word, like--at what point would there be a sustainable way of life? And if you look at, like, what you were saying with countries, um, lifestyles, people who... happiness being the goal, um, is that why industrialization and mass production? If you look at, like, I was in Guatemala last summer, and I was in a village with no running water and it was based on, like, agricultural productions and just living day to day, food.. and the people there were the--the Guatemalan people were the happiest I have ever met. And they were like the poorest, thinking in terms of material possession, or it seems like they were the happiest. It says a lot about what people need verses what they think they need, and what they strive for.

Me: *Yeah, this hits upon social class, and industrialized verses non-industrialized nations, higher class verses lower class... like something that I struggle with is how does one account for class in these kinds of issues? What is the ideal situation? Where does class fit into it? You know what I mean?*

Pepa: Oh yeah! That's definitely something that I think about!

Me: *What do you think about? Like, what are your questions and ideas about it?*

Pepa: Ok, so, like, there's these people, um, do you know of any indigenous environmentalists? It seems like an environmentalist is very, like... a rich person thing to be--it's a status thing.

Me: *It's a privilege to be--*

Pepa: It's a privilege thing! Yeah, like, if you know, by studying... the social economics of our major is kind of skewed in a way. It's not diverse. It's definitely, like, rich kids.

Well, I don't want to say rich kids, but people that don't have, that aren't super poor, from suburbs or maybe Chicago, or farm community boys. (laughs)

Me: *There are farm community boys?*

Pepa: (laughs) Oh yeaaaaah!

Agnes: They are more like fish and wildlife ecology--they're not--

Pepa: They're not human--

Agnes: They're not--yeah

Pepa: (laughs) --human *dimensions*.

Agnes: They're not as interested in, like, conservation. That's a generalization. Like, I remember freshman year in one of my intro-level classes, everyone was like "I raise hogs!" Like, they were interested in the production aspect, or hunting and things like that, so it's interesting to have that dichotomy within our major. Like we talk about deer, and some people are thinking about deer, like, running into the woods, and some people are thinking like "I'm gonna shoot that deer." It's, like, it's very...

Pepa: Yeah, it's so interesting just within our major, cos, like, I feel like the human dimensions people are the ones who are like "I wanna change the world!". They aren't satisfied with society, you know, like, the hippies, the idea makers.

Agnes: It would be interesting to interview someone in a different concentration.

Pepa: Mm hmm, fish and wildlife?

Agnes: Um, and so back to socio-economic class. These issues--it's hard, because you say, like, I'm vegetarian, I, like, buy local products when I can and buy organic--like, that's a privilege too, you know? Like, in the society we live in, you know, it costs more to think about those kinds of things, and to practice those kinds of things. It's much cheaper to buy a loaf of, I don't know, like, white bread, super enriched, nasty stuff, than to buy something whole grain and... I don't know... just thinking about that.

Me: (getting passionate) *Ahhh I'm trying not to interject... my own personal opinions...*

Pepa: Do it !!!!

Me: *I've been trying not to do that in these interviews. But I'm so crazy, um, all this stuff. Anyways. Whatever.*

Pepa: We don't care about those ethics! Tell us what you think Anona!

All: (laughter)

Me: *It's so screwed up! It's so skewed! And I see it like that... and that it is my privilege to see it like that as a white middle class college---*

Pepa: College student!

Me: *How do you think the college thing fits into it? Because we live within the parameters of Champaign-Urbana right now. We have to deal with Champaign-Urbana, in the middle of Illinois, in the middle of the agricultural zone of the U.S.--*

Agnes: And corn is in everything.

Me: *--And corn is in everything. High-fructose corn syrup... but how--*

Pepa: --or seed corn!

Me: *How do you feel about, like, living within this community that started as an agricultural school, and in Champaign-Urbana, being a student here?*

Pepa: Well, I don't know... I think it's interesting, just, like, the dichotomy that's in Champaign-Urbana, you know, all your liberal, artist, hippie undergrads live here in Urbana, whereas Champaign is very fratty and doesn't have recycling. Are you talking about that kind of thing? Or the actual school itself?

Me: *Anything! I mean, we are affected by the school too.*

Pepa: I think, like, the drive down for people from the suburbs to Champaign-Urbana really blows my mind. I think about Illinois--Illinois right? We're the "Prairie State"! Yeah! "Prairie State! Ok, how much prairie's left? Um, less than 1% of the state? What happened to it? You drive by and it's cornfield, after cornfield, after cornfield... Wow, we fucking manipulate the shit out of this planet! We do what we want! What about prairie plants? People think the prairie looks like an uncut lawn--mow that shit, it's prairie! Cultivate it now! Let's profit off of it! Let's profit off this planet! Like, we do not take into account any of the value--the ecosystem value--that's given to us, like, to society. I don't know, like, Illinois has the best soil in the world, you know? We've got great soil! Nowhere else can you find such good soil--but what do we use it for? Ok, we're making high-fructose corn syrup? Alright. Feed corn, so people can eat fucking meat whenever they feel like? Like, that's another status symbol--being able to eat meat whenever you want! But, I don't know... I just think that drive down is crazy. I don't know... I've got enough to say about that, but your turn to talk.

Agnes: Um, going back to the original question--like, within the parameters of Urbana-Champaign. There are people who care about these types of issues. I mean, not just in my classes, but um, like, there are communities of people who care. There are people who come to campus who speak, and people fill up those lecture halls. I think

that just because it's, like, in the midwest and out in the cornfields, there is, like, a diverse perspective. For I don't know what reason, I don't know what draws people to this area--why Champaign-Urbana.

Me: *It's a unique positioning... Ok, this might sound like a strange question, but can you both **walk me through** a typical day--what you do, what you eat, how you get to your places--just a typical day?*

Pepa: Ok!

Agnes: You wanna...um..

Pepa: Dude, I don't care! Whatever--I'll go first (laughs). So, I wake up next to Carlos--my morning is great...

(laughter) ...and then I put on clothes--clothes I probably got for free. Maybe I bought them at a thrift store some time ago. Um, maybe I'll put on some music. Then I go upstairs and eat some organic granola and organic SOYMILK (shouting)!

Me: *Where do you get your granola?*

Pepa: We buy it bulk from the food truck that comes to the cooperative. All of our stuff comes in these HUUUGE containers! I'll have to show you the pantry--it's huge!

Me: *Please do!*

Pepa: Ok, I will. Um, we buy all of our food bulk. And the bag of granola--you know at the co-op [Common Ground] they have the huge bags of granola? Kind of like that. Um, and food that's not purchased from the food truck--it's the same truck that delivers to Strawberry Fields all their products--but um, people go to the farmer's market once a week. They go to the farmer's market to get all the produce--the locally grown produce--and what can't be supplied locally they get from Strawberry Fields. That's where all my food comes from. The only time in the week that I don't eat co-op food from here is at the hari-krishna dinner on monday nights. I don't know where they get their food from. Anyway, I ride my bike to get places--to class. If I don't ride my bike, I'll walk. I don't have a car. I don't wanna car. I don't need a car. Um, I go to classes and think about the state of the world a lot. Um, I think about--if you wanna call it sustainability you can call it sustainability--

Me: *No, it's whatever you wanna call it--*

Pepa: (laughs) Oh yeah, I think about humans and nature and the disconnect, and I think about racism, and poverty, and I think about how humans--I think about the human species a lot. I mean, we're just, like, an overpopulated species of african primates who, like, overpopulated and manipulated the planet in a way. Like, I think about our arboreal roots and--is it true? Is it true that humans are--that we actually come from a species that was arboreal? Yeah, am I saying that right? Anthropology--arboreal?

(laughs)

Me: *Arboreal? (laughs) I was bored in that class. Have you ever heard of the "grandmother hypothesis"?*

Pepa: No--tell me about it!

Me: *You can google it (laughs) Ok... back to your everyday--you think about these things in class--you were talking about--*

Pepa: Yeah, well, maybe in class, maybe whenever actually. I read other things too. I do a lot of other readings. I think about the revolution--I think my thinking is very anti-capitalist. I think of capitalism as a means which sort of causes all this environmental destruction. Um, anything in the name of profit. Humans have unlimited wants. We'll never be satisfied if we focus on material goods. So, I think that capitalism has sort of caused havoc on this planet in terms of, like, people in societies. I think there's, like, a huge, huge crisis right now, you know--Justice and Nature. And I think you can't fight either of those crisis exclusively until you work with them, like, with each other. I wrote a paper on that the other day. Anyways...

Me: *Can you tell me more about that?*

Pepa: About that idea?

Me: *About justice and nature--how you can't fight either of them without integrating them?*

Pepa: Well yeah, I think it boils way back down to the dichotomy--the false dichotomy---that there is separation between people and nature. I think that it's combined. I mean, exploitation of nature, exploitation of humans-- I mean, I'm using a dichotomy in speaking about it. But um, I'm still formulating my ideas on it. I think it was talking about in terms of development--developed and underdeveloped nations. About how Harry Truman back in 1949 sort of coined the word. Just the coining of the word development was the cause of this entire perspective--by using, by saying, the word development, by calling nations developed or underdeveloped. By saying something's underdeveloped, you're saying that it's on the same--that it's going to fall on a similar plane that our development's happened. But it can't happen that way. It's pretty impossible for that to have the same scale, the same time, the same model, considering the different cultural, historical, social contexts are all different.

Agnes: And I don't think it's a good model--

Pepa: --and that goes back to sustainability--is that the model we really want to follow? How can that be the model? We need fucking six planets if that's the model! And that's what our model is right now! Neoliberal capitalism is what the economic paradigm is in our planet, and it's fucked up because, like, the divisions of, like, the G8 summit, for

example. Like 8 people! 8 leaders of 8 wealthy-ass nations decide the fate for 6 billion people basically, you know? How is that possible? How have we structured the way of the world to be able to, like, integrate... So, I guess that goes back to, like, you can't have anybody focus on the environment or people exclusively, cos it's the same thing. Like you can't have one without the other. It's the same fight, it's the same cause. I don't know if I'm even sounding clear about it, but... anyways.

Me: *Yeah. Pretty clear.*

Pepa: Alright Lisa! Your day--I'm going to go pee now.

Agnes: Ok.

Me: *Yeah, **walk me through** your day!*

Agnes: I live in a college dorm, so it's, like, different because I don't get to make all my own choices. So I hafta, like, do things within sort of like, it's a very artificial environment to live in--a dorm. Where you don't control your heat, you don't control what food is cooked, or even times that you eat, and even certain things like that. It's all, like, prescribed. Um, I would say, like, my day, to wake up and, um--I don't want to go through the whole day, just because I feel like it's, like..

Me: *You don't have to. I'm kind of interested in the details though too. But if you feel uncomfortable doing it--*

Agnes: No, no, it's just, I don't know what details you would like...

Me: *Well, like, what do you do in the morning?*

Agnes: Ok, well, I wake up! I like to wake up and give myself some time to kind of just be--I like to stretch into my day sort of. I like to do some stretching when I go to bed and wake up to, like, feel... I think people sit in chairs too much and I think that they don't... people are--I know I'm tense and I know other people--like people's bodies, with just the things that we do, um... so I like to do some stretching, shower, eat breakfast. I usually eat breakfast in my room, because they don't really have cereals downstairs that I like--they're all these sweetened cereals and I like just, like, something whole grain.

Me: *What do you eat?*

Agnes: Like, Kashi, uh, it's, like, oats...

Me: *Which one...seven grain with sesame? (laughs)*

Agnes: Um Autumn wheat? And, like, fruit, and I make coffee in my room every morning.

Me: *Where do you get your coffee?*

Agnes: Um, there's this store in Chicago, Metropolis, and I go there and get coffee. Ok, and I go to class and I think I participate in all my classes pretty much? Like if I feel, if I want to say something, I say it. Either to the teacher or in response to other students. People say some pretty dumb stuff in class and it really bugs me when people don't, like, other people don't put them in check. I go home for lunch every day at the residence hall that I live in--the vegetarian cafeteria that I go to. I'm not vegetarian, but uh, in general I try to kind of--if there's vegetarian options available I eat those. I'm also lactose intolerant, so if something's cheesy, I don't eat any of those. So um, I go back to classes and at night I always just study or hang out with friends. My weekend, like, I don't think--I think I used to be more like the typical college kid. Like "Ok, it's Friday--I gotta go drink." Ya know, I'm not really like that. I'd rather just be with good people, or get things done that I have to get done, and I think that partying can kind of set you back in terms of your overall weekend, and um, I really need the next day. I try to keep in touch with... like I don't do a very good job with news and world news, world events. I need to spend more time everyday--just like 20 minutes going on different media websites and looking at what's going on in different places, like what am I not finding out on the street, in the DI, or in the Tribune. You know, like what's going on? I have a brother right now who's in Palestine. He used to be the guy at the dinner table who'd be like "Did you hear what's going on in Chiapas?" and I'm like "no" but now I'm not around him anymore.

Me: *Did your brother go here?*

Agnes: No, just like when we were in highschool together.

Pepa: You know what I did to solve that problem of not knowing what's going on in the news? I made Democracynow.org my homepage. Yeah, so now when I click on--you know, like Oh I gotta check my email or something, and I click on firefox and there it goes, it has these headlines that say, like, boom boom boom, and if I wanna learn more about it I can click on it, and it'll be like Oh shit, that shit sucks!

Agnes: Yeah, my homepage is on hotmail and that is not...

Pepa: No! I also get New York Times, like daily email. And if I get a headline that I'm like, if I have time, if I'm killin' time, I'll click on it--alright corporate media, what do you gotta tell me today? And I'll see what it says.

Me: *Do you read the DI? You said you read it sometimes.* (to agnes)

Agnes: I don't know, I like to read it on thursdays because the Buzz. Uh, um, like what's going on on the weekend, you can find out a lot of stuff through that.

Me: *Yeah.*

Agnes: And there's just some fun stuff in the DI--I don't read it for its news value ever...

Me: *Ah, just wondering.*

Agnes: Um, I don't know, there's definitely stuff I need to work on. Like at some point I think the vegetarian lifestyle just makes a lot of sense to me, you know, energy conservation, and just actively makes a lot of sense. I haven't like totally adopted it yet.

Me: *Is it something you want to consider doing?*

Agnes: It is, and a lot of my good friends are. I just feel like if someone's cooked--like if my mom's cooked some dinner and its got meat in it, I'm... I don't know...

Pepa: Like, you gotta find your own personal balance--what works for you.

Agnes: Yeah, that's sort of--that's my stance on it. Like I don't go out of my way to like go get a hamburger, but, like.. I don't know.

Me: *Right. (to Pepa) You are vegetarian--how long have you been vegetarian?*

Pepa: How old am I? I've been a vegetarian for 5 years? 6 years? 7 years? Yeah. 6 or 7 years. 5-7.

Me: *Are you vegan?*

Pepa: I'm leaning more towards the vegan side now, but I'm not exclusively vegan. I feel like I've had a bad experience with vegans and judgement, and uh, very, like, arrogant complex.

Agnes: And you said kind of you find what works for you. You know, if someone has something that--like they made cookies and there's butter in the cookies, I don't know what refusing one of those cookies would do for the overall well-being of... I don't know. You know what I'm saying?

Me: *Yeah, I know what your saying. Can you describe to me a particular situation where you've had trouble with vegans being like ARG, you know, crazy vegans?*

Pepa: (laughs) Yeah! So when I lived in the dorm. this guy, like, I used to help run the campus vegetarian society when I was a freshman. You know, and I was eating an ice cream cone. And this guy--this hard core straight edge vegan punk guy--comes up and--

Me: *Is his name Frank?*

Pepa: Yeah, actually!

Me: *Just wondering-*

Pepa: UH OH!

Me: *Oh man--he's everywhere, man!*

Pepa: UH OH!

Me: *No don't worry-- (laughs)*

Pepa: Now he's cool. He's way better now. Four years ago, no--when we were freshman--Oh my god, I couldn't stand him!

Me: *I remember meeting him freshman year actually. I met him in the union and he was talking about being vegan, and I wasn't vegan yet, but I was, like, raised vegetarian, so I was... I hadn't thought about being vegan. And he was talking about it, and I was like, I don't wanna fucking talk about this--this is stupid.*

Pepa: Yeah.

All: (laughter)

Me: *Sorry... go on.*

Pepa: (laughs) And he was like "Do you know that comes from cow tits Pepa?" and I was like "Nooo! Leave me alone man!"

Agnes: Shoulda put it on his face!

Pepa: Yeah next time how does it feel shoved up your butt, man! No it's cool. I just don't think it's cool to make judgements like that. Like to go up to people and like--it's not like I was eating a steak or something--I mean, that wouldn't have been right either.

Me: *Is that different?*

Pepa: I mean, I feel that if his problem was animals--animal products--I feel like an ice cream is like way more okay than a steak, I mean, from his perspective.

Agnes: And from your perspective--you're not gonna, like, go up to somebody whose eating a steak and go like "you know that comes from a cow?!"

Pepa: It's not my place, you know. I think that a lot of people that I know have been really pushy with their ideas, but coming from a perspective of a person who agrees with them, I think its not right and it gives vegetarianism, like, a really bad name, and I don't like it when people go up in other people's shit. I think if it comes up in conversation--I don't really talk about being

vegetarian anymore. I think if it's in conversation, or you know how it can just come up in like health or something, then maybe I'll say something--maybe I'll just define myself like "Yeah I'm really glad I'm vegetarian," instead of like...

Me: *So health plays a role?*

Pepa: Absolutely. God, yeah. For me, health is--because I wasn't healthy before. I had no idea--I just put in my body whatever was in front of me. I didn't even think about it. And then once I became vegetarian I realized--cos my mom was, like, "Well, I'm not cooking for you--you wanna be vegetarian, you cook for yourself." I said "Fine I will." So I started cooking vegetarian, and I realized, oh, I need this type of mineral, oh that's what that does, oh okay! Alright! It's just awareness. And I think that goes back to environmental sciences. Like whatever you can make yourself aware of--whatever it is you choose to be aware of--you will be aware of it. So if I make myself aware of food, then like, that's what I did.

Me: *What was the turning point for you?*

Pepa: For being vegetarian?

Me: *Yeah, if there was one.*

Pepa: I don't think it was a turning point. I think it was just a process, like an on-going process.

Me: *I have a question now, like, there this big topic now of eating locally--does this fit into your ideas of, like, sustainability and what we've been talking about?*

Agnes: Well, you know, it makes sense. Like, if you actually ship your food across the United States, or your bananas up from Latin America or wherever--that doesn't make sense. It makes a lot more sense to eat butternut squash that's grown here, by someone who worked hard to produce it--they should, I don't know, I feel like it makes a lot of sense to eat locally if you can. Um, you can't get bananas that are local obviously--maybe that means you don't eat as many bananas and you eat more apples that are grown around here? Maybe it means you can think about things like that a little bit. I don't think its, like you said, a fad. I don't think its negative at all. Do you?

Me: *No. I mean, I've been trying to eat locally all year, like because I was reading stuff over the summer. Um, I've been vegan, and I shop at the Co-op and I shop at Strawberry Fields, and then I also used to shop at, like, Shnucks sometimes more often, but now I go to the Co-op for staples, and then everything else I get at the farmer's market--*

Pepa: Yeah!

Me: *Like in the winter--just eat squash all winter, and like you say about bananas?*

Like, I used to eat bananas all the time! Cos they're so cheap and I love bananas! But this year, I was like, you know, I can do without bananas. I just go get a bunch of apples--fresh apples--and I eat apples instead of bananas. It's so easy! It's so good... apples last longer too.

Pepa: They do! ...You can't make apple bread though that's as good as banana bread!

Me: *No--you gotta have exceptions man!*

All: (laughing)

Pepa: I know, you gotta have--you gotta find your balance!

Me: *I gotta have peanut butter. You gotta have certain things.*

Pepa: Yeah.

Agnes: Yeah.

Pepa: Yeah, I know a lot of people who don't think of this stuff at all!

Agnes: Or people who, like, I'm thinking about in the dorm--people who just pile their plate. You know, you can go back, and there's a thing of hot food whenever. And just like the amount of waste that people generate is just pretty bad.

Me: *Like what you said about just an overall awareness of what you are actually doing.*

Pepa: Yeah. Hey! This Monday at 7:30 at the Urbana Free Library--

Me: *Yeah!*

Pepa: You saw that?

Agnes: What is it?

Pepa: These two people... they're part of the Green party. They have green tea at the Urbana Free library, and they are giving a talk about--they did a local-only diet for a year, and so they are talking about their year of eating local.

Me: *Ok! I have it written in my iBook I think.*

Pepa: Cool. (laughs)

Me: *Did you guys like--Oh, I have another question about your major: like, what are your classes now? You don't have to list every single one of them--but just what kinds of things do you take?*

Agnes: There aren't that many. I'm taking "World Music" because it's fun and it's two gen. eds. We're in that together actually. And um, I'm taking "Dendrology", which is the study of trees--

Me: *Oooh!*

Agnes: --and it's awesome, like, we go to the woods once a week for four hours, and we look at trees and we point at trees, and he's like "what is this?" and he gives you the acorn, and you have to identify what kind of oak tree it is. So that's one class. Um, "tracking ecosystems", "fish and wildlife ecology" and then "environmental econ part three" and that sucks.

Pepa: The class that I'm T.E.ing for? It sucks? Nooooo!

Agnes: It's just not anything I wanna learn!

Pepa: Yeah, I know, it sucks. I don't like that class anyway.

Agnes: ...but yeah, that's me.

Pepa: Ah, I don't have a good representative for what I'm taking, because I took all my NRES classes so I could study abroad this fall, but you know, life happens, and I'm here (laughs). So I'm taking... my gen. eds. are "American Indian Studies", "Japanese Tea Ceremony"--

Me: *Oh I wanted to take that--both of those classes! Is "Japanese Tea Ceremony" good?*

Pepa: Are you kidding me? Is the name of the class not "Japanese tea Cermony"?!! Take it! It's so cool!

Me: *I couldn't get in last semester.*

Pepa: Shit, ah, try it next semester! Like first thing--registration BAM do it. Um and I'm taking a community and natural resources class--natural resource/sociology.

Me: *That sounds pretty interesting.*

Pepa: Yeah, it's interesting, that's for sure. I can give you a paper that you can read about--it's "crisis of justice and nature".

Me: *Yeah I'd like that .*

Pepa: I was reading it, and I was like "Yeah.." Cos the title of the book is "Ecology, Politics, and Violent Conflict"--yeah. But the title of the paper was like "Environmental

Sustainability and Social Justice"--something like that. Oh can I think of anything else? God, I don't even know what I do with my time. Oh and I do research too. I'm working in in the Human Nature lab--looking at how---Human and Nature---at how environmental epiphanies. People with outdoor experiences--how is it that they have a sudden change in their ideas, a change in their awareness.

Agnes: I saw a sign up, that you could participate in a study--is that your study?

Me: *Can I participate in your study?*

Pepa: I think we're done collecting data.

Agnes: You have to have had an environmental epiphany.

Me: *I had an environmental epiphany...*

Pepa: Yeah... it's kinda.. if you've had an environmental epiphany I'd like to talk to you about it, that'd be kinda cool. Cos I'm doing, like my research project that I'm doing is looking at informal literature. I'm looking at blogs and internet postings.

Me: *Thats so cool!*

Pepa: Yeah, like non-institutionalized academic literature, like what people say about-- novels, I'm gonna look through and see what is it about being outdoors that causes-- what is the methodology that causes an epiphany? Is it the time? Is it the place? Is it being outside your comfort zone? You know, is it traveling that causes it? What are the parameters in order to create an environment where people can have a realization about the world? So, how does that translate into forest management, or natural resource management? What about snow mobiles, or building more roads through the areas? Does it need to be quiet? Does it need to be this? It's just sort of asking research questions.

.....

Pepa: Where were we?

Agnes: I don't know. Are you still going to that lecture?

Pepa: I don't know. I don't really feel like it. What time is it? I definitely don't feel like it.

Me: *There's a food film festival on sunday. Are you guys going to that?*

Pepa: Um, I used to run that stuff (laughs) I did that last year, uh, I was leader of Just Food--I used to do a lot of things.

Agnes: I don't know--I just have a lot of stuff going on right now, and uh..

Pepa: I have a house meeting. Cooperative living, although it's great, it takes up a lot of time.

Me: *Oh can you tell me about that real quick?*

Pepa: Yeah, sure. Well this is pretty much the most eco--at least in terms of living spaces, it's always good to cram more people in a limited space.

Agnes: Share things--share refrigerators, share utilities, you know.

Pepa: Bathrooms, and you know, if everyone has their own kitchen with its own piping--that's wasteful. You don't need to have your own kitchen. And you know, electricity--we buy all eco-friendly, compact fluorescent lightbulbs and everything, you know, if its yellow let it mellow (laughs). Ok so all the labor--you cook once a week, um, you spend about 2 hours cooking once a week, an hour cleaning up afterwards, an hour, at least an hour of other labor around the house. Labor's split up--you sign up at meetings on sundays--when you're gonna cook, when you're gonna clean, and what labor you're gonna do for the week. Uh, so there's the common room, there's the dining room, you can clean the stairs, vacuum the stairs, bathrooms, you can choose which floor or whatever. Baking break--we bake all our fresh bread here organic. We have a breadmaker.

Agnes: Mmmm

Pepa: It's great, I love fresh-baked bread. Um, someone purchases all the food from the food truck, someone goes shopping at the farmer's market. It's all divided up. And plus, because it's a lot of people, we have a really diverse produce selection and things in the pantry. So it's great--I love living in the cooperative. There's vegans that live here. I eat mostly--I can't imagine being not--I always eat vegan here. I only eat dairy when it's given to me, you know, when, like, my mom will make something. So I guess you could call me vegan.

Me: *Yeah. ...that's awesome, how many people live here?*

Pepa: Thirteen.

Me: *Ah damn, that's so cool! Can you give me a tour?*

Agnes: I'm gonna go.. I have to..at..

Pepa: But come on back for dinner!

Agnes: I'll come back, I might not come back before you clean up--would you rather have a cleanup or a helper?

Pepa: Agnes! You're a guest!

Agnes: But I wanna--I don't ever wanna be invited and just not...

End of Interview.

After the Interview:

I turn off the recorder before Agnes leaves, and right before Pepa gives me a tour of the house. We walk to the kitchen, which is through the hallway in front of the front door. The kitchen is medium sized, and cluttered with cabinets, cooking utensils, and appliances. A rack next to the refrigerator holds a food processor. On top of the fridge are a jar of Vegemite and vitamins, among other things. There is a window above a sink in the center of the counter. A bread-maker appliance sits on the counter. There is a dishwasher. On the cabinets are posted papers about health and recipes. One is a list of food with various health qualities listed for each food. The cookbook *Vegan Planet* is on the counter. Pepa offers me a small yellow cupcake that is sitting out on a plate: made from a recipe from *Vegan with a Vengeance*. The stove is impressive: the range has six big gas burners, a long oven, a broiler, and a vertical storage compartment for pastry sheets. Pepa leads me into the pantry, which is attached to the back of the kitchen. (!!!!!!!) This is where I lose it! What would I give for a pantry like this! Along on wall is a shelf full of clear plastic buckets and containers filled with dried grains, legumes, flours, and other nonperishable goods. There is quinoa, "Seven Grain" breakfast grains, oats, granola, black beans, garbonzo beans, nutritional yeast, the cheap college staple TVP, etc. There are four bottles of a fairly good Balsamic vinegar. About five bottles of "Bragg's Liquid Aminos" are on the floor. A corner cupboard holds huge cans of organic whole tomatoes, and usually coconut milk, but they are out. There are two fridges; one has tubs of "Soy Garden" butter-substitute, tofu, and huge jars of peanut butter. The other fridge holds frozen foods, which I didn't see. I told Pepa not to be surprised if she comes home one day and I am camping out in the pantry. She insisted that I was welcome to come over and cook anytime--seriously! Next to the entrance of the pantry is a sign-up sheet for each person's cleaning and cooking duties at the co-op. The entrance of the dining room is next to this. The dining room has a rectangular table that seats 6-8, and a smaller round table they call the "cafe table". These are put together to make a larger table. On one wall is a shelving unit that contains dishes, mugs, cups, and utensils. On the opposite wall is a long table where the dinner is served buffet-style.

Pepa's room is in the basement of the house. It is bright in the basement due to south facing windows that line the top of the wall. She tells me that her room is the "stereotypical" college student environmentalists room with its colorful tapestries on the walls and yoga mat. Her bed is two mattresses on the floor, and a lap-top sits on a desk. There is a lot of decoration: posters, pictures, art, college clutter. She shows me

some of the books she reads for class, which mostly deal with the interaction between humans and the environment, except for two books about Japanese Tea Ceremony. Pepa shows me the other bedrooms downstairs and the bathroom, which has black and white tiles, lavender walls, and a tub that stands alone and is not part of the wall. She leads me to the second floor and shows me the bedrooms. The "nicest" room in the house faces south and is bright and airy, with a cut-out nook for the bed. One girl painted her room half light blue and half dark blue, and it feels like you are in an underwater bubble. There is a black shape on one wall that looks like an island; she says she doesn't know what it is and it is not finished.

I prepare to leave, and Pepa hands me an article that she read for class that she says I might be interested in: Wolfgang Sachs' "Social Justice and Environmental Sustainability in the Post-Development Era". She invites me for dinner at 7:00. It is her turn to cook, but she doesn't know what she is going to make yet. She tells me that dinner will be interesting for my project because there will probably be a lot of people to talk to about sustainability, environmentalism, etc. I say that I will definitely be there. Then she says that I am welcome to just hang around until 7:00 if I don't want to go all the way home, but I have plans for a bike ride. I leave and Pepa walks to the library.

At 7:00 pm I ride my bike back to the Co-op. I tap lightly on the screen door and walk in. One roommate is sitting on the couch, and Pepa is in the kitchen putting focaccia in the oven. Agnes is also back for dinner and is helping Pepa. I offer to help, but they say that everything is ready. The tables in the dining room are pushed together and there are chairs set up around them. A few people start milling into the dining room and Pepa begins bringing out the food, setting it on hot mats on the long table. She excitedly tells me that everything is vegan. Paul and the other people I met earlier who live in the house are all here, as well as three guests besides Agnes and I. We all take plates, bowls and utensils from the shelves and begin to serve ourselves. Dinner is a huge pot of polenta, made with chiles and spiked with a little nutritional yeast, a chunky tomato sauce with green olives and mushrooms, potato leek soup that tastes subtly of celeriac, chocolate/carob chip cookies, lemon cupcakes, and non-vegan white frosting. Grape juice, water, and wine are to drink. We all sit down and begin eating. I notice that I must have a big appetite because my plate is more full than others'; I laugh about this and they tell me its cool because they usually have tons of leftovers anyways. Someone brings out some quinoa and tells us that it is for the soup. Pepa explains that she forgot about the focaccia and so it will be an after dinner treat. There will also be biscuits because she accidentally messed up the frosting by adding flour instead of powdered sugar, so she converted them. The food is warming and filling, and perfect for one of the first cool days of the year. Everyone seems to be familiar with the more atypical ingredients like quinoa, although some people express that they haven't eaten it much before. Some people do not know what polenta is, so we collectively explain that it is basically a cornmeal mush. Pepa introduces Agnes and I to everyone, and someone comments that there are as many non-co-op people at the table as co-op residents. We decide to go around the table and introduce ourselves. One guy is a friend, two girls are the sisters of a co-op resident, and then me. Brittany is a co-op resident who is originally from the midwest, but moved out to Humboldt County

California for a while, and is now back doing graduate work at the University. She says that she has a love-hate relationship for California; she loves how "progressive" it is in some areas, and she loves the natural beauty and social atmosphere, but also is annoyed at how Californian's "don't even know the midwest exists". We both agree that the midwest has its charms. Meg is a first year graduate student who works with people with disabilities, Gina is an undergraduate in psychology, Dag studies German, and I don't remember what Daria studies, but she has an interesting teased-out 50's housewife hairstyle. All of us are white. Throughout the entire conversation at the dinner table, people make short, sarcastic comments such as "Oh well that's neo-liberal politics!" and plenty of scoffing at institutions and corporations. Brittany and Daria discuss going to a friend's art show that ends at 9:00, and they debate whether the distance is "bike-able". It is past downtown Champaign, and they think it will take 25 minutes to bike there. Some say that it is definitely bike-able, and some think that time might be a constraint. Daria says "Everything is bike-able right now...everything in North America!". I think they agree to take a car because they want to be able to spend more time at the art show. Agnes, Pepa and I bring the dirty dishes into the kitchen and begin putting the leftovers in big plastic tubs. The foccacia and biscuits are done; Pepa forgot salt in the foccacia dough, but it is still good, especially with Vegemite. They use a dishwasher because there are "too many people not to". Pepa makes tea for us, and we help clean up. All the leftovers are labeled with the date and what it is. Pepa asks me why I am not living in the Co-op because she says that I am "perfect for the co-op"; I tell her that I probably would have, had I known about it. Later a friend of Pepa comes by and eats some of the leftovers. In the living room, Paul, Dag, and two of their friends are preparing to play "Risk"; there is talk of having a game night. Pepa lounges on the chair and I look through "Adbusters" while a black cat jumps from the floor to my chair and around the room. After about 30 minutes I leave. I am welcome to come back anytime.

